

i was reared intellectually on existentialism.
for the existentialist there are no plots
because there is no Plotter.
a story happens into existence
and creates its essence as it goes.
in this state of chronic uncertainty,
in which all choices are made,
the characters, not to mention the writer,
experience existential angst.

i'm now convinced my existentialism
has prevented me from concocting
commercially marketable manuscripts.

if i get much poorer, i intend
to become a structuralist.

MY RETIRING COLLEAGUES

i.

they made an offer they couldn't refuse
to my colleagues near retirement age.
it's known in academic irony
as the golden handshake.
it gives incentive to retire early
they say it will make way for new blood.
i didn't see anything wrong with the old.

ii.

when i was still untenured
this old military-man-turned-professor
wrote the advisory committee that i should
be let go because i dressed like a slob.
he said my image was not conducive
to taxpayer support for faculty salaries.
the chair of the committee
(of which i was a member)
was about to entertain discussion
when keither skarsten spoke up:

"we don't have a dress code.
it's none of our damned business.
i move to table."
and so they did,
and the threats to take the matter higher
never materialized.

iii.

i'm convinced that blaze bonazza's
one glass eye can x-ray female attire.
the godfather of the fifth floor,
for years he reigned as disraeli of the back bench
in the academic senate. when my first thin sheaf
of verse appeared in 1966 in an edition of 300,
blaze immediately invited me to read to a literary
circle in his home. he began his last speech
in the senate with, "i may be a lame duck,
but i'm not a dead duck yet. this, however,
may be my last quack. and incidentally, why did
the previous speaker refer to me as
'the former gentleman?'"

iv.

you never listened to dick lyon
for five minutes without learning something.
i lived in fear of displaying my ignorance.
i stood for a lot of things he disapproved of
but he seemed to have made a unilateral decision,
years ago, that he'd not disapprove of me.
he stood for culture. he was a model
of the educated man.

v.

charles brooks helped to hire me
and had me to his home.
abraham avhi and arnie schwab
encouraged my poetry and only gently
castigated my grading standards.
luster williams let me teach
any course in the catalogue.
bucky buckland visited my new-born child
and assured the elders my awkwardness
was that of youth. charles allen always
showed the light side of the solid scholar.
sue wilson put up with me
with a seafarer's wisdom, and audrey peterson
joined us at the forty-niner's tavern.

vi.

new blood, indeed;
the old blood was, like st. emilion,
high and dry.